



井上堅一 ほか

kenji Inoue/others

『バカとテストと召喚獣』が
大ヒットの人気作家。TVア
ニメ2期放映中。

『その他執筆作家。掲載順』

田口仙年堂、日日日、庵田定
夏、嬉野秋彦、榎一郎、本田
誠、櫂末高彰、野村美月、綾
里けいし、庄司卓、前書き、
羽根川牧人、竹岡葉月、築地
俊彦、はせがわみやび、新木
伸、佐々原史緒、田尾典丈。

白味噌 ほか

Shiromiso/others

カバーイラスト担当。今回は
爽やかな二人の恋の始まりの
イメージで。繋いだ手の間か
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3 Minutes Boy Meets Girl - Chapter 17

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Chapter 17



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This is a namecard.

A namecard...well, that's what it's called, but it's not actually something that official.

The address and phone number are all handwritten in a pale sky blue. The trimmed round paper was laced with stick-its the girls like. Clearly it was handmade, and meant to be something plain.

In fact, it's probably handmade anyway, and also something a certain girl personally handed to me at the graduation ceremony a month ago.

"Due to family reasons, I'm going to my mom's hometown to work."

"If you can, please send me a call or a mail."

"If you do have the chance to come somewhere near, please do remember to come over."

I did remember her shoulders shivering as she said that. It was a rainy day, and the white fingertips poking from the hem and sleeves of her sailor uniform were soaked.

It's a namecard.

The address starts off with N-prefecture, S-city.

Following that is the name of the district, a long line of an address that seemed to belong somewhere beyond the horizon.

In fact, it's located somewhere secluded.

From the city center, I had to take a two and a half hour ride on the Limited Express, and also bounce around on another local train for an hour, only to arrive at an empty station, the closest outpost to my destination. I did search through on the internet, but seeing the place for myself really left me majorly shocked. The building with the galvanised iron looks as if it can collapse give a single breeze, and there's no sense of human presence at all, let alone an automatic gantry and a vending machine.

After the train that ferried me here vanishes beyond the horizon, I make up my mind, and fish out the cellphone.

"Right..."

The name and number I kept looking at during this past month appears on the little LCD.

She's a gentle, quiet girl.

Amongst the noisy classmates, she's always showing a matured, sidelong face. Her long hair's casually tied to the side, but no ornament on her will match the purity and cuteness displayed with that very ordinary uniform.

The only thing connecting us was that we were just library reps, and our conversations basically consist of work and what book genres we like. We never did meet outside of school, and I did send her back a few times after school, only when the rep meetings got too late.

That's why I couldn't believe it.

That those feelings of good impression, expectations and hope...were

actually filled on the long, wide little piece of rectangular paper.

Taking breaths one after another, I continue to do my best and order my trembling finger to press the send button.

...It's been a while. How are you feeling?

...I just want to see how you're doing.

...I just so happened to be around the neighborhood.

These are the lines I came up with and practiced in my mind over and over again. I did think through the back part, and if the response's devoid of the goodwill I felt back then, I'll immediately hang up and not think of her. If she's still a little delighted, maybe we can continue to meet.

I can't send her a message. It's too difficult for me to ask how she's doing with a few words, and...I want to hear that voice; even if it's just a little.

However.

I prick my ear to hear, but I can't hear anything. Impatient, I glance at the cellphone, and was stunned.

"Ou-out of the service area?"

I got careless.

Isn't this something very possible in this rural, hilly area?

I frantically look around.

In this dilapidated building that looks ready to collapse at any given moment, I manage to find a green phone located beside the gantry gate. There are numerous scratches on it, and I can tell that it's something dated. I reach my hand for the receiver, but I can't help but doubt my eyes.

There's no way to insert money into this phone.

On the contrary, there's a little, 5mm slit by the side. How's this supposed to work...how am I supposed to use this phone?"

"I-I need a telephone card!?"

I read out the sticker beside the phone, and can't help but groan. A

telephone card? That's something I only saw in elementary school.

"Tch!!"

I click my tongue, put down the phone, and dash out of the station. I guess there's a phone booth or two outside the station, even if it's in such a rural area, right?

I can't see any target however; things probably aren't going as planned however, or that it's to be expected given the landscape.

"Whe-where's the convenience store? There's probably a phone located right in front of it, right?"

Taking quick steps from the station to the long, straight road, I arrive at a road called 'N-prefecture Highway'.

However, the scene in front of me bears no similarity to the grandeur name. It's just an endless plot of farming fields on both sides, and there's no building to be seen, let alone a convenience store.

For a while, I was rooted to the spot.

Feeling a little hopeful, I fish my cellphone out to check, and again I find the words 'reception out of range' there.

"Looks like I got no other choice..."

I drag my feet.

I got to this place after 3 hours on the train, and I hear that the wider the roads near the station, the more vibrant they are. After walking down this long highway, maybe I'll arrive at a larger highway or a fork, and I'll definitely be able to find a convenience store or store, or somewhere where I can make a phone call. Worst case scenario is that I have to borrow a phone from someone else.

Yes, and by the time I realized it.

I find the slope increasing in steepness as the longer I walk.

The gradual slope at first extends forward, like it's a patch up of the space in front. The sides however became slopes however, and the fences I found just a

while back vanish, even the few people that appeared were gone, and in the end, there's not even asphalt below my feet. I'll say rubble even.

"Is this really the county? Are you kidding me?"

But even if I try to question someone, I don't have a passer-by to ask.

Basically, I hate going outdoors.

To me, those guys who like climbing the steep, lush slopes are just masochists, and those guys who like to go out and soak in salt water are idiots. Why is it that I have to end up having to survive the outfield?

I should have just sat on the train for 3 hours and make contact at a neighboring station, right? I should have visited a nearby house and borrow a phone from there, right? Maybe I should have heeded her words "If you do have the chance to come somewhere near, please do remember to come over." and contacted her before I left, right? Or...I shouldn't have thought of trying to find her, right?

It's May, and only a few days ago did it start a get warmer. The sun's ray scorches my back, and as for me, unused to marching, is left with wobbly legs and a parched throat. Also, I can't see a vending machine.anywhere.

Eh?

Am I going to be done before I can solve the call? I don't have anything like food or something.

I can feel the sweat on my back being extremely icy. At this moment, I suddenly notice a pile of red on the empty plain by the side.

I stagger towards it, and its appearance becomes clearer. It's an apron of a Jizo there, fluttering from time to time in the breeze.

There's an old public gas station opposite it, and there's something large and strange placed there.

There seems to be a very heavy plastic bin standing at the still metal pillar. And inside it is a very old grey phone.

My phone keeps shivering as it reaches for the phone, and I stick the heavy receiver by my ear, hearing a beep.

"I can use it...!"

I open my wallet, as is stunned.

I don't have any spare change except for a 500 Yen coin, a 5 yen coin and a 1 yen coin...!

I continue to stare at the phone.

The slot has the label 100 Yen and 10 Yen noted by the side, and in that case, that means I can't use the phone, right...?

I'm immediately left limp as I collapse onto the floor. I can't move at all. I don't want to move...

I intend to kneel down here, and the red Jizo apron continues to flutter in my eyes. Seeing the tender, emotionless face on the round stone, I can't help but feel some hatred.

"Damn it...why is my luck so terrible..."

I inadvertently let out some plain old cursing, and suddenly, my eyes gather at a spot. There's spare change right beside the Jizo; is it offering money? Three 10 Yen coins.

I quickly stand up and pick up the coins, putting the 500 Yen coin there as I clasp my hand together.

"Sorry. I'm not an offering thief here, and I'm offering more money back. Please forgive me, really."

With my trembling hand, I grab the 10 Yen coins and insert them into the telephone slot. The light clicks ring as they fall, and the long beep become short and rhythmic. This phone actually shows a little display in an energetic manner 'You have another 3 minutes left for your call'.

3 minutes?

Coming this far, going through all this, and I can only talk for 3 minutes?

I hold my breath, and tap at the silver number pad.

No, wait, isn't 3 minutes enough?

...It's been a while. How are you feeling?

...I just want to see how you're doing.

...I just so happened to be around the neighborhood.

First off, these.

I just want to ask about this, and this is enough. Didn't I come all the way here just for this?

After the phone beep for about 10 times—

"Hello."

A familiar voice reaches me through the receiver.

It's a cheerful, delightful girl's voice.

The voice that told me the books and movies she like.

"Erm..."

The time limit is 3 minutes.

I eke out whatever little strength I have left.

And I proceed to do my best to talk to her.